Lithuania: A Land Most Often Dominated by Grasping Neighbors

By FRANK J. PRIAL

"What was stolen must be returned."

Vytautas Landsbergis, a Lithuanian nationalist who is also a member of the Soviet Congress of People's Deputies, expressed a longtime yearning of the Lithuanian people when he spoke at a rally in Cathedral Square in Vilnius last week. President Mikhail S. Gorbachev's appeal that Lithuania remain within the Soviet Union runs contrary to a desire for independence.

Lithuania, absorbed by Poland in the 16th century, suffered under the gradual dissolution of Poland at the hands of czarist Russia in the 18th century and, after three partitions of Poland — in 1772, 1793 and 1795, became, like Poland itself, a part of Russia.

Lithuanian history in the 19th century was marked by a linguistic and cultural revival led principally by the Roman Catholic clergy. The revival in turn inspired frequent anti-Russian uprisings that culminated in Lithuanian independence with the collapse of Germany and Russia after World War I.

Brief Independence

Proclaimed an independent kingdom under German protection in February 1918, Lithuania became a republic in November that year. Its

Before the Soviets, it was the Czars, or Poland, or Germany.

independence was short-lived. Bolshevik forces installed a pro-Soviet regime in January 1919. With German help, the Bolsheviks were expelled in August 1919, and a peace treaty recognizing Lithuanian independence was signed by Moscow in July 1920.

The Poles seized Vilnius, the old Lithuanian capital, three months later and occupied it until World War II. It was ceded to Poland in 1938, then returned to Lithuania after the Nazi-Stalinist partition of Poland a year later.

Lithuania was forcibly incorporated into the Soviet Union in 1940 along with the Baltic republics of Estonia and Latvia and parts of Moldavia, after Stalin and Hitler signed a secret agreement dividing Eastern Europe into spheres of influence.

After a well-controlled election, the Kremlin made Lithuania a republic of the Soviet Union. It was that step that the Lithuanian Parliament declared invalid last August. The next year, German troops rolled in and occupied Lithuania for four years. In July 1944, the Soviet Army recaptured Vilnius, and a period of Sovietization began.

It was not the first such attempt experienced by the Lithuanians. From 1864 to 1905, all books, magazines and periodicals in either Polish or Byelorussian were banned and books in Lithuanian could be published only in the Cyrillic alphabet. Russian was the only language permitted in the schools, and the Roman Catholic Church was banned.

Lithuanians have paid dearly for their demands for independence. When they joined the failed Polish uprising against Russia in 1863, 180 Lithuanian insurgents were hanged and 9,000 were deported to Siberia.

The night of June 14-15, 1941, the Soviets rounded up and deported to Siberia 30,000 Lithuanian intellectuals. In all, the first Soviet occupation of the country resulted in about 45,000 people being deported or killed, including 5,000 political prisoners executed as the Russians fled the Nazis.

When the Soviets returned in 1944, about 60,000 Lithuanians were deported to Siberia. During 1945 and 1946, the Soviets deported 145,000 more, and, when forced collectivization of agriculture reached Lithuania

in 1949, a further 60,000 people were sent to northern Russia and Siberia.

Annually, despite Soviet objections, Lithuanians have marked the anniversary of their 1918 declaration of independence with rallies and celebrations. At cultural and athletic events, Lithuanians regularly jeered Soviet contestants, and, in recent years, Russian residents of Lithuania frequently complained that they were mistreated by militant Lithuanians.

The Catholic Church, officially proscribed by Moscow, remained strong and influential, even underground. Once, in the early 1970's, 17,000 Lithuanian Catholics directly petitioned the United Nations Secretary General for assistance.

They preserved their literature and language, prevailing upon Moscow to make Lithuanian their official language two years ago. According to the Europa Yearbook for 1989, 105 of the 134 newspapers published in Lithuania are in the Lithuanian language, as are 88 of the country's 119 periodicals.

Ethnic Lithuanians make up about 80 percent of the republic's population of 3.6 million. There are substantial numbers of Russians and Poles, as well as Byelorussian and Latvian minorities. A considerable Jewish population was largely exterminated from 1941 to 1944.

Last August, just as all three Baltic republics, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, prepared their mass demonstrations to mark the 50th anniversary of the Stalin-Hitler pact of 1939, a commission of the Lithuanian Parliament declared that the 1940 Soviet incorporation of Lithuania was invalid.

2 Deaths Are Reported In Strife in Azerbaija

MOSCOW, Jan. 13 (Reuters) — Mo attacked homes today in a form of Soviet Azerbaijan, and at least people were killed, reports from area said.

The official press agency Tass there were "tragic events" in the that brought "human victims." A dependent local journalist in Baku the first reports he gathered indic that two people died.

The journalist, Nazim Ragimov, the incidents came after some de strators broke away from a huge baijani independence rally "provocateurs" distributed pamp calling for a pogrom against nians.